

Nevada Mid-Elevation Monarch Waystations and Butterfly Gardens



Whether you have a small garden in the city or acres in nearby surrounding areas, you can draw butterflies to your yard to enjoy. While the mid-elevations in Nevada create unique challenges, you can still enjoy the ephemeral beauty of these graceful visitors. In a world of vanishing habitats, butterflies will throng to your yard if you provide four basic requirements: nectar plants, host plants, a tree or large shrub for protection from the heat of the day or to spend the night and an occasional water source for “puddling.” While in the East monarchs are not known for puddling, in Nevada even monarchs may seek a water source with our dry climate.

Host Plants

Host plants, also called larval plants, are annuals or perennials where butterflies lay their eggs. As the tiny caterpillars hatch from the eggs, they will consume the leaves and often the flowers as food. While hungry caterpillars can quickly defoliate a plant, new leaves quickly grow afterwards. You can enjoy watching the entire life span of butterflies in your yard by including host plants. Plus more butterflies will often linger in your yard looking for a mate or to find just the right place to lay their eggs. To qualify as a registered Monarch Waystation through Monarch Watch, plant at least ten milkweeds (*Asclepias spp.*) and include other host plants to draw a variety of other butterflies to your garden. Mass plantings are more noticeable and attractive to butterflies.

MILKWEEDS – MONARCH AND QUEEN BUTTERFLIES			
Host Plant	Botanical Name	Native?	Growing Needs
Showy Milkweed	<i>Asclepias speciosa</i>	Yes	Full sun, low water but favors ditches with occasional water
Narrowleaf Milkweed	<i>Asclepias fascicularis</i>	Yes	Full sun; low water
Pallid Milkweed	<i>Asclepias cryptoceras</i>	Yes	Full sun, often found in dry areas

SAMPLE OF HOST PLANTS – START WITH A FEW FAVORITES, THEN ADD MORE EACH YEAR.	
Butterfly	Host Plant
Dainty Sulphur	Dogweed, marigolds, asters
Fritillary	Violets
Red Admiral	Nettles, pellitories
Mourning Cloak	Willows, Cottonwoods
Checkered-Skipper	Mallows
Anise Swallowtail	Parsley family, dill
Clouded Sulphur	White clover, alfalfa
Queen Alexandra’s Sulphur	Golden banner, vetches & other legumes
Orange Sulphur	Alfalfa, clovers, legumes
Western Tiger Swallowtail	Cottonwood, Ash, Willow, Alder, Aspen, & others
West Coast Lady	Mallows
Painted Lady	Thistles, mallows



Male monarch butterfly on *Asclepias speciosa*

Nectar Plants

All butterflies need nectar to sustain their adult life but not all flowers are created equal. Butterflies have favorites and they can vary by the season. Monarchs visit in the spring, but late summer and fall are the premier seasons, especially during their migration. For a wide variety of visitors, make sure there are flowering plants in your garden throughout the entire butterfly season. Clusters of several plants are most effective and visible to flying butterflies. Here is a sample of some favorites:

Common Name	Botanical Name
Sunflowers	<i>Helianthus spp.</i>
Tithonia	<i>Tithonia rotundifolia</i>
Rabbitbrush	<i>Chrysothamnus nauseosus</i>
Alfalfa	<i>Medicago sativa</i>
Golden Crownbeard	<i>Verbesina encelioides</i>
Dogbane	<i>Apocynum cannabinum</i>
Mints	<i>Mentha spp.</i>
Zinnias	<i>Zinnia spp.</i>
Cosmos	<i>Cosmos spp.</i>
Verbena	<i>Verbena spp.</i>
Asters	<i>Aster spp.</i>
Goldenrod	<i>Solidago spp.</i>
Western Yarrow	<i>Achillea millefolium</i>
Coreopsis	<i>Coreopsis spp.</i>
Common Dandelion	<i>Taraxacum officinale</i>
White clover	<i>Trifolium repens</i>



Monarch butterfly feeding on Tithonia

Important Note Regarding Pesticides

Many plant nurseries or their growers use systemic or topical pesticides on their plants to prevent insect damage on leaves. Remember that butterflies are insects too, and their caterpillars will not survive if they chew a treated leaf. Always ask your nursery if your plant has been treated with systemic or topical sprays. It is always a good idea to hose down your entire plant when you bring it home. Remember especially to rinse under the leaves since this is often where larvae are found.

When you maintain your butterfly garden, do not use any pesticides or insecticides. Even nearby spraying can drift onto your visiting butterflies' favorite plants. Instead, incorporate a variety of host and nectar plants to help keep pest levels down and allow the populations of natural predators to increase to reduce unwanted pests.

References

- Monarch Joint Venture <http://monarchjointventure.org>
- Monarch Watch Waystation Program <http://monarchwatch.org/waystations>
- Monarch Watch Bring Back the Monarch Campaign <http://monarchwatch.org/bring-back-the-monarchs>
- Southwest Monarch Study <http://swmonarchs.org>
- North American Butterfly Association <http://naba.org>
- The Xerces Society <http://xerces.org>

This publication was created by the Southwest Monarch Study in support of the North American Monarch Conservation Plan advocating for the creation of Monarch habitats across the Southwestern United States.